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ABSTRACT

A questionnaire was developed to determine the understanding and response of student teaching field experience directors to the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) student teaching requirement. NCATE-approved schools in Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, and Nebraska were surveyed. The NCATE requirement mandated changing student teaching time from 8 to 10 weeks. Analysis of responses indicated that the directors reacted favorably to the new requirement on a personal level, but not so much on a professional level, suggesting that they knew of no supporting evidence that length improved quality. Some of the directors felt that the requirement was only supported by the "more is better" trend. Directors also noted the need for improvement in other areas besides student teaching, stressing that length alone was no guarantee of high quality. Twenty-three references are listed. (CB)

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The Magic 10: Questions and Responses to NCATE's 10 Week Student Teaching Requirement

A Paper Presented at the Summer Workshop
of the Association of Teacher Educators
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Trends in recent years have been toward an increase in field experiences for teacher education students. Within the past decade this component of professional education has grown from a total of approximately 280 clock hours to almost 420 hours (Kluender, 1984). The primary thrust of this increase has been on earlier and more extensive pre-student teaching experiences (MacNaughton, Johns, & Rogus, 1982). However, some attention has been given to the length and nature of the traditional student teaching experience. The new NCATE standard with its 10 week minimum requirement for student teaching may generate more thought and discussion on this facet of the professional program (Standards, 1986).

As a contribution to that discussion this paper addresses (1) the length of student teaching as a predictor of student teaching success; (2) the rationale and research base employed by NCATE to recommend the minimum of 10 weeks of student teaching; and (3) surveyed responses of Directors of Student Field Experiences in the Midwest regarding the new student teaching requirement.

The Length of Student Teaching as a Predictor of Student Teaching Success

Much of the research literature on predicting success in student teaching deals with factors other than the length of the experience. Common topics are previous field experiences (e.g. Marvin, 1983; Scherer, 1983; Dravland, 1981; Grossman, 1980);

personality characteristics (e.g. Garcia & Denton, 1976, Halpin, Halpin & Harris, 1982; Henjum, 1984; Mundel-Atherstone, 1980); orientation and behaviors of cooperating teachers (e.g. Hoffman, Funk, Long, & Keithley,1982; Johns & Gee, 1984); the ability of the student to "read" the classroom (e.g. Neill, Fitzgerald, & Jones, 1983); and academic preparation and performance of the student teacher (e.g. Dobry, Murphy, & Schmidt, 1985; Nelson & Wood, 1985).

Turning to length of student teaching, one finds little. A South Carolina study indicated that an extended student teaching experience would be beneficial in improving student teacher's skills and performance and thereby enable them to do better on the Assessment of Performance in Teaching (APT), the instrument used to satisfy state requirements regarding minimal competencies of its teachers (Freeze, Buckner, Oliva, & Brooks, 1984).

Morris (1980) reported that cooperating teachers believed that a full semester of student teaching offered the student opportunity to perform at a higher level and to develop competencies generally accepted as important for teaching effectiveness. A study involving student teachers from two major Michigan universities found that by extending the experience from eight to 15 weeks, the students' confidence to perform educational tasks increased (Caul & Hahn, 1980). Covert and Clifton (1983) found that a 20 week practicum compared to a three week one reduced students' idealism regarding teaching.

Admittedly, the above studies address the issue of length in student teaching but not specifically the relationship between length and actual success in student teaching. No studies were

found that address the length of student teaching as a predictor of student teaching success. On the negative side, one can find writers who question the ultimate value of increased time requirements for student teaching. Frequently, such persons are concerned about the assumption that more is auomatically better. As Cruickshank and Armaline state it (1986, p. 37): "We all know that practice does not automatically perfect skills, or there would be a direct correlation between one's years of teaching experience and teaching effectiveness." Others are concerned that prolonged experiences will readily acclimate the student to the educational status quo which often is isolated from professional knowledge and practice. Such writers would even advocate less time in traditional student teaching and other traditional field experiences (Beyer, 1984; Cruickshank & Armaline, 1986).

Admidst this weak and inconclusive research base, NCATE has moved to a minimum requirement of 10 weeks for student teaching. Upon what basis was such a decision made?

The Rationale and Research Base NCATE Used to Recommend 10 Weeks of Student Teaching

Initial telephone inquiries to the NCATE office led the writer to believe that the requirement was based upon a solid research base. A written request for the rationale and research base resulted in the following reply (Gollnick, 1987):

> This particular criterion is based on professional sound practice rather than a research data base. Many studies of what practicing teachers have found the most valuable in their teacher education programs have found that the student teaching is the most frequently identified. The "old" NCATE standards did not have a minimum requirement for

> the length of student teaching, and sometimes we would find that it was as brief as four weeks for institutions seeking NCATE accredition. The NCATE Council that includes teacher eductors, specialty content educators, teacher, and school administors (sic) agreed that a minimum should be established. The ten weeks seemed to capture the practice of many institutions. The Council realized that some institutions have 12 or 16 weeks of student teaching, but those timelines might not fit institutions on the quarter system. Thus, ten weeks was set as the minimal length of time that should be acceptable for nationally accredited institutions.
>
> All of the accrediting agencies with which we work develop standards and criteria for compliance from what their professions have learned through their research data and what is known from effective professional practice. The student teaching requirement is based on the latter.

Thus, it appears that the magic "10" was selected for standardization purposes with an eye on the direction of prevailing professional sentiment, and apparently without serious consideration of those opinions which question the wisdom of additional, traditional field experiences. To understand the impact of such a decision on professional practice, one must ask: "To what extent do those who carry out such policies understand and agree with them?"

Surveyed Responses of Directors of Student Field Experiences to the 10 Week Student Teaching Requirement

To determine the understanding and response of the Directors of Student Field Experiences in the Midwest to the new NCATE student teaching requirement, a questionnaire was developed and sent to all NCATE approved schools in Illinois (21 NCATE schools; 52.3% response), Iowa (12 NCATE schools; 91.6% response), Kansas (15 NCATE schools; 66.6% response), Minnesota (20 NCATE schools; 85% response), Missouri (19 NCATE schools; 68.4% response),and Nebraska (12 NCATE schools; 92.3% response). These schools were

NCATE approved according to the Thirtieth Annual List, 1983-84. Of the 100 questionnaires sent, 74 were returned for a response rate of 74%. Nebraska had the highest rate of return with 92.3% while Illinois had the lowest with 52.3%. Following are the questions and a summary of the responses.

1. What is the current minimum length of student teaching at your institution for a typical education major? (N = 74)

The data revealed that 22.9% of the institutions require eight weeks for student teaching, 5.4% require nine, and 24.3% require 10, 8.1% require 12, and 13.5% require 16 weeks. The remaining institutions reported varied requirements depending upon the major, number of endorsements sought, etc.; variable options, i.e. a minimum of x weeks but one could elect to do more; or non-traditional configurations. The most frequent requirement was 10 weeks or a combination of 10 weeks and some other number (36% of respondents); the latter was especially true for elementary and K-12 majors.

2. If the minimum is below 10 weeks, when do you anticipate implementing the new requirement? (N = 24)

Of the reporting insitutions 32.2% did not meet the current NCATE requirement. This group planned to implement the new requirement on the following timeline: 16% in 1987-88; 60% in 1988-89; 8% in 1989-90; 16% thereafter.

3. What has been your personal reaction to the 10 week requirement? (N = 72)

Personal reactions to the new requirement were 68.4% positive; 13.6% negative; 13.6% neutral; and 4 1% gave other responses.

4. Do you believe the literature on student teaching supports the 10 week requirement as preferable to 8 weeks? (N = 69)

Respondents believed the literature supported the 10 week requirement at a rate of 45.5% while 23.5% believed it did not; the remaining 30.8% indicated they were uncertain on this question. Interestingly, while 68.4% responded favorably to the new requirement, less that 50% felt sure the literature supported it.

5. If yes to question 4, what factors made the 10 week preferable? (N = 26)

Of the group who believed the 10 week preferable, 83.8% of them responded to this question with the following kinds of factors:

1. It gives longer supervised experience.
2. Studies favor a longer period.
3. It provides time to judge the student teacher's impact on learning.
4. It better prepares the student for the first job and likewise increases one's confidence as a first year teacher.
5. Students regard student teaching as the most meaningful part of their professional program.
6. It provides greater opportunity for experiences at two levels.
7. It provides greater opportunity for more teaching time, personal development, and greater range of experience.
8. It fits the quarter system well.
9. It reduces the "rush" of the eight weeks.

6. Further, if yes to question 4, who are, according to your awareness, the key authors and/or sources of data that support the new requirement? (N = 12)

Of those who believed the 10 weeks preferable to eight, only

38.7% of them responded to this question. The most frequent response was their personal experience or that of colleagues. Other responses included student evaluations of the program, personal research, NCATE redesign, and a few indicated they did not know, were not sure, or that the variables were too ill-defined.

Arthur Wise and Gary Griffin were mentioned as authors whose work supports the 10 week concept. Another respondent mentioned that the Kappan articles likewise supported the thinking behind the 10 week requirement.

7. If no to question 4, for what reason(s) do you believe the decision for the 10 week requirement was made? (N = 13)

Those who did not believe the literature supported the 10 week reqirement as preferable to eight weeks gave the following reasons for why that requirement occurred. The responses were reported as follows:

1. The belief that more is better.
2. A movement towards a 5-year program.
3. An overreaction to criticisms of teacher education programs.
4. I don't know.
5. It fits the quarter system.
6. New NCATE standards.

8. Among the variables that constitute a successful student teaching experience, how significant is the variable of length? (N = 68)

The data revealed that 38.2% believed length to be very important variable in student teaching success; 54.4% ranked it

as moderately important, while 4.4% saw it as of little importance. Several respondents made comments which stressed the importance of direct experience. Several others however, cautioned against the notion of length per se, insisting rather that quality was more important than quantity.

Observations and Conclusions

When the data are viewed as a total unit, several observations and conclusions emerge.

1. There is a dearth of research on the relationship of the variable of length of student teaching as a predictor of success in that experience. The variable of length is generally discussed in respect to opportunities it makes available to the student or long-term benefits. Perhaps the question of length as a predictor of success is the wrong question; maybe the question should be: "What constitutes a successful student teaching experience and what elements must be present to accomplish this?"

2. The trend in teacher education toward more field experiences has been encouraged by national education associations, professional educators, field experience directors, graduates of education programs, and even by critics of teacher education who tend to believe this is one of the few indispensible parts of the program (Cruickshank & Armaline, 1986). This study illustrates the effects of that orientation. The primary rationale by NCATE for the 10 week requirement was that effective professional

practice dictated it. Consistent with this, Field Experiences Directors reported that 77.8% of their institutions already met the new requirement. Further, as one would expect, 68.4% of those surveyed indicted a positive response to the new requirement. Furthermore, the reasons respondents gave to explain the new requirement heavily reflected the value of direct experience - experience which their students tend to rank highly.

3. The NCATE requirement apparently reflects a commitment to traditional approaches and thinking regarding student teaching. It appears not to have gotten into the heated debate of reducing "apprenticeship" kinds of experiences and stressing longer professional "internships", "clinical student teaching" and similar ideas as have the Holmes Group and the Carnegie Forum. Given the critics of current field experiences, NCATE seems not to have come to grips with the two oppositional tendencies discussed by Beyer (1984) of increasing field experiences and yet the commitment to provide more than a vocational training experiences for prospective teachers. On the other hand, perhaps too much is being read into the significance of the 10 week requirement; perhaps it is no philosophical statement at all, merely a minor regulatory standard.

4. Directors of Field Experiences tend to react more favorably to the NCATE requirment at the personal response level than at the professional, informational level. While 68.4% felt positive about the requirement, only 45.5% strongly believed that the literature supported it as preferable to an eight week experience. Moreover, when asked for a data base to support the

new standard, only 38.7% responded to the question. These responses may reflect lack of awareness of the literature or merely the ambiquity that exists in it.

5. Directors of Field Experiences who did not believe the literature supported the 10 weeks as preferable to eight felt strongly that the requirement was a reflection of the commitment to the notion that "more is better". Others saw it primarily as a response to public criticism of education or the advocacy for five year teacher education programs.

6. Finally, while the respondents generally applauded the new standard, the majority saw length of student teaching as only a moderately important variable. With this even-handed approach, one would have expected much more in the comment sections on the quantity versus quality issue. At best, a longer student teaching provides greater opportunities for a host of experiences, but the quality of those experiences are still dependent upon what the cooperating school, cooperating teacher, college supervisor, college program, and the student make of them. Length alone is no guarantee of quality. This writer feels strongly that unless monitoring and reflective interpretation of the student teaching experiences occur, little benefit will be derived from the new requirement.

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